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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001305

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/28/09
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ LETTER TO PRESIDENT CLINTON

REF: (A) FRIEDMAN-AKUETTHEH 4/28/99 FAX, (B) CARACAS 00691, (C)
CARACAS 00560

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN F. MAISTO. REASON: 1.5(D).

¶1. (U) DURING AN APRIL 28 MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RANGEL, AMBASSADOR WAS PRESENTED WITH A LETTER FROM VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ TO PRESIDENT CLINTON. (LETTER AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION WERE PASSED TO WASHINGTON PER REF. A, TEXT BELOW.) UPON EXITING THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S OFFICE, RANGEL PRESENTED THE CHAVEZ LETTER TO AMBASSADOR FORMALLY BEFORE THE WAITING MEDIA CORPS. AMBASSADOR RESPONDED TO A QUESTION ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS "GOOD." ASKED WHY THE PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA FELT IT NECESSARY TO PERSONALLY SEND A MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT CLINTON NOW, AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED THE REPORTER ASK FOREIGN MINISTER RANGEL, ADDING THAT IT IS ALWAYS POSITIVE WHENEVER CHIEF EXECUTIVES OF DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY.

¶2. (C) IN THE PRIVATE MEETING BEFORE THE UNEXPECTED, SET-UP PUBLIC PRESENTATION, AMBASSADOR CALLED RANGEL'S ATTENTION TO THE LETTER'S LAST PARAGRAPH, SPECIFICALLY ASKING IF CHAVEZ WAS REFERRING THEREIN TO THE JANUARY MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT CLINTON AND THEN PRESIDENT-ELECT CHAVEZ. RANGEL ANSWERED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. AMBASSADOR TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO RECALL HIS PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND WITH CHAVEZ THAT ANY FUTURE VISIT BY CHAVEZ TO THE U.S. SHOULD BE PREDICATED UPON THE COMPLETION OF A CONCRETE AGENDA OF AGREEMENTS IN AREAS OF MUTUAL INTEREST, SUCH AS EXPANDED NARCOTICS COOPERATION, A MARITIME AGREEMENT, A BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY, AND NOW A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING PERMITTING U.S. AIRCRAFT TO OVERFLY VENEZUELA AS PART OF A FORWARD OPERATING LOCATIONS (FOL) AGREEMENT IN CURACAO AND ARUBA, AS PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED, AMONG OTHERS (OUTLINED IN REFS. B AND C.) RANGEL AGREED, ADDING THAT THE GOV WOULD FOCUS ON THESE ISSUES AFTER CHAVEZ' MEETING WITH PRESIDENT PASTRANA AND HIS VISIT TO BRAZIL, BOTH IN EARLY MAY.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: THE GOV HAS HIGHLIGHTED CHAVEZ' LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT IN AN ATTEMPT TO DISPEL LOCAL SPECULATION ABOUT THE STATE OF RELATIONS, STEMMING FROM THE CANCELLATION OF EB A/S LARSON'S VISIT (SEPTEL), AND THE AT TIMES BLUNT PUBLIC AIRING OF DIFFERENCES OVER UNHRC HUMAN RIGHTS POSITIONS BETWEEN THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THE U.S. AMBASSADOR LAST WEEK. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT RANGEL IS FEELING VULNERABLE. THE MEDIA EVENT WAS LARGELY INTENDED TO DEMONSTRATE PUBLICLY THAT U.S.-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS ARE ON TRACK. AMBASSADOR INFORMED RANGEL AFTER THE EVENT THAT NICE WORDS ARE FINE, BUT THAT THE SUBSTANCE OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WILL BE DETERMINED BY CONCRETE COOPERATION--OF WHICH THERE HAD THUS FAR BEEN NONE WITH THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT, AND THAT WE, OF COURSE, ARE

LOOKING FORWARD TO FUTURE COOPERATION IN THE AREAS WE HAVE DISCUSSED. RANGEL SAID HE AGREED, AND THAT WE WILL BE HEARING FROM THE GOV.

14. (U) BEGIN TRANSLATION OF CHAVEZ LETTER TO PRESIDENT CLINTON:

(LETTERHEAD)
HUGO RAFAEL CHAVEZ FRIAS
PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA

MIRAFLORES, APRIL 27, 1999

DEAR PRESIDENT (HANDWRITTEN)

I WAS PLEASANTLY IMPRESSED BY YOUR EXCELLENCY'S STATEMENTS DURING OUR AMBASSADOR, ALFREDO TORO HARDY'S PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS AT THE WHITE HOUSE.

YOUR MESSAGE, WHICH I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST, VERY ELOQUENTLY EXPRESSES YOUR GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS TO RENEW AND REFORGE RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. I VERY ENTHUSIASTICALLY WELCOME THOSE INTENTIONS. OUR GOVERNMENTS SHARE COMMON INTERESTS, AS DO OUR PEOPLE. WE CERTAINLY SHARE THE DESIRE FOR A SOLID AND VIBRANT DEMOCRACY, THE KIND ENVISIONED AND PRACTICED BY MEN SUCH AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND SIMON BOLIVAR.

THE CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM HELD LAST SUNDAY, APRIL 25, AND THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY TO BE ELECTED WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS, THROUGH FREE AND PLURALISTIC EXPRESSION, ARE MECHANISMS CHOSEN BY THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE TO PEACEFULLY RE-ESTABLISH THE REPUBLIC, THROUGH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, MARKED BY A PROCESS CHARACTERIZED BY FORMER PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER DURING HIS VISIT TO CARACAS LAST DECEMBER AS A REAL "DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION."

AS YOUR EXCELLENCY WISELY POINTED OUT, MY COUNTRY FACES A SERIES OF SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES WHICH WE ARE CONFRONTING RESPONSIBLY AND WITH AN ENTIRELY VENEZUELAN CONSCIOUSNESS. WE INHERITED AN ECONOMY IN CRISIS. WE PROPOSE RECOVERING IT THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL POLICIES ORIENTED TOWARD PRODUCTIVE REACTIVATION AND ECONOMIC EQUILIBRIUM, BASED ON THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE. MR. PRESIDENT, WE ALSO INHERITED AN ETHICALLY TROUBLED COUNTRY. WITH UNSWERVING DETERMINATION, HOWEVER, WE HAVE BEGUN TO RE-ESTABLISH THE MORAL CODE THAT MUST DRIVE EVERY SOCIETY, RELENTLESSLY FIGHTING THE SERIOUS DISEASE OF CORRUPTION, THROUGH WHICH RESOURCES EQUIVALENT TO FIVE "MARSHALL PLANS" WERE SQUANDERED IN VENEZUELA.

WE SHARE YOUR OPINION THAT "OUR ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION CAN HELP IMPROVE THE SITUATION." THEREFORE, MR. PRESIDENT, OUR COUNTRY IS OPEN TO ALL TYPES OF U.S. PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR INITIATIVES TO ADVANCE OUR COUNTRIES' MUTUAL DEVELOPMENT. LIKEWISE, I FULLY SHARE THE FIRM INTENTION TO FIGHT DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ALL CRIMES RELATED TO THAT DISEASE.

I AM PLEASED TO ACCEPT YOUR INVITATION TO VISIT YOUR COUNTRY. I THANK YOU FOR WARM EXPRESSIONS OF FRIENDSHIP, WHICH ARE RECIPROCAL. I FORMALLY PROPOSE THAT THE ITEMS MENTIONED IN THIS LETTER BE INCLUDED IN THE AGENDA FOR OUR NEXT CONVERSATION IN WASHINGTON.

SINCERELY,
(SIGNED BY PRESIDENT CHAVEZ)

END TRANSLATION

MAISTO